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ABSTRACT

Presented are the results of a survey of the ways in which male and female are represented to young children and the relative space given to boys' or girls' activities in early childhood institutions. The questions were of two kinds: (1) those which simply asked for the number of representations, objects, etc., and (2) those which asked the rater to judge the nature of these representations of male and female. The survey was carried out in November 1975 in 42 early childhood institutions--10 primary new entrant classrooms, 10 kindergartens, 12 playcenters and 10 day-care centers. Both city and rural areas were covered but no attempt was made to carry out a random survey. No marked differences between the various institutions emerged and hence the results have been combined. Results are enumerated for: dressing-up clothes, jig-saws, puppets, pictures on the walls, book displays, science displays, space, and atmosphere. (MS)

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MALE AND FEMALE IN PRE-SCHOOL AND JUNIOR SCHOOL

A study carried out for the Conference on Equality of the Sexes

23-27 November 1975

PS 008973

MALE AND FEMALE IN PRE-SCHOOL AND JUNIOR SCHOOL

This study was a co-operative enterprise. The pilot work in 11 early childhood centres was done and the check list prepared by Marie Bell (Department of Education) and Geraldine McDonald (NZCER and SROW). The survey was carried out by members of Wellington and Auckland Society for Research on Women and Christchurch NOW. The organization of the survey was in the hands of Rae Julian (SROW and NZCER) for Wellington, Pat Syme for Christchurch, and Diane Strevens for Auckland. The analysis was done by Jenny Neale and the report was prepared by Janet Wills (both from Wellington Branch SROW). Thanks are also due to the many pre-school and school teachers who co-operated in the project.

The survey was carried out in November 1975 in 42 early childhood institutions - 10 primary new entrant classrooms, 10 kindergartens, 12 playcentres and 10 day-care centres. Both city and rural areas were covered but no attempt was made to carry out a random survey. No marked differences between the various institutions emerged and hence the results have been combined.

The check list was intended to (a) suggest the way in which males and females are represented to young children, and (b) the relative space given to what are usually thought of as boys' and as girls' activities, in early childhood institutions. The questions were of two kinds (a) those which simply asked for the number of representations, objects, etc., and (b) those which asked the rater to judge the nature of these representations of male and female.

RESULTS

Dressing up clothes

	Male	Female	Neutral	Total
Number of garments	178	598	109	885
Number of shoes (pairs)	5	126	13	144
Number of hats	128	207	40	375
Number of accessories (Bags, etc.)	25	266	34	325
	336	1197	196	1729

Generally, dressing-up clothes were not displayed, but stored in boxes, often within the family play area. There was an overwhelming predominance of female clothes, 66% of garments, 86% of shoes, 55% of hats and 80% of accessories were female. Staff suggested that this was because they generally rely on donations, and mothers, being more influenced by fashion than fathers, are a better source of cast-offs!

Cowboy or Indian suits were the most commonly found male clothes, apart from a few hats. Occupational clothes were very rare.

Jig-saws

Total number of jig-saws	1129
How many males are shown?	280
How many females?	162
How many jig-saws show only neutral figures or inanimate objects?	768

	Active	Passive	Neither
Number of male figures	153	61	54
Number of female figures	64	45	32

	Nurturing & Domestic role	Occupational role	Neither
Number of male figures	24	96	139
Number of female figures	48	10	69

Two-thirds of the jigsaws showed only animals or shapes and patterns, and so could not be accused of being stereotyped. However more male figures were shown than female. Exactly twice as many females as males were judged to be in a nurturing or domestic role, and ten times as many males were shown in what was classed as an occupational role.

Puppets

	Male	Female	Neutral
Puppets	26	30	79

Puppets were not found in many of the centres visited. Most of those seen were neutral - animals, trolls, clowns - and no authority figures (such as policemen) of either sex were found.

Pictures on the Walls (Excluding work done by children.)

Total number of pictures	1009
How many pictures show males?	321
How many pictures show females?	292
How many pictures show men as sex symbols	16
How many pictures show women as sex symbols?	36

Work done by children was predominant in most rooms. Some centres were in shared halls and were not allowed to put pictures on the walls.

Of the just over one thousand pictures considered, the majority showed animals, or neutral objects, but men were shown in slightly more pictures than women were. Pictures using people as sex-symbols were not common, but 16 pictures showed men, and 36 pictures showed women, as sex-symbols. Magazines were the usual source of these. Occupational posters, of health, airline and police staff exhibited sex-role stereotyping.

Fifteen of the interviewers considered that the men in the pictures were more commonly doing exciting things and 10 of the interviewers thought the men were doing dull things. The women were three times more often seen by the interviewers as doing dull things as doing exciting things. Often they were just sitting or standing doing nothing at all. Active things were considered exciting.

Females were shown in a nurturing or domestic role almost twice as often as men were. Of the many pictures examined, 321 showed males and of these, only 33 showed males in nurturing or domestic roles. However, most staff stressed the point that pictures were changed frequently and often centre on a particular theme for a week at a time - e.g. father's occupation, Spring, transport - which might slant the findings.

Book Displays (Covers of the books only.)

How many books are displayed?	~~1764~~ 1798
How many book covers show males?	496
How many book covers show females?	280
How many book covers show animals, neutral and/or inanimate objects?	988

We considered only the covers of the books on display, and staff pointed out that the books are changed frequently, and that one should not judge a book by its cover! However, the same pattern emerged in every

collection. Well over half the book covers were neutral, showing objects or animals, although animals were frequently humanised into stereotyped roles.

Of the remaining books, approximately 28% show males and 15% show females. These numbers alone mean that males are likely to be depicted in a greater variety of roles and activities. Females, if doing anything at all, were most frequently involved in domestic situations.

Science Displays

Is any science displayed?	Yes	33
	No	9
If yes, is the science mainly biological (plants and animals etc.)?		29
Mainly physical, (magnets, prisms, rocks etc.)?		3

Thirty-three of the 42 centres had science displays. The vast majority showed biological (growing plants, small animals), rather than physical science.

Staff said this was because the displays were made up from what children brought along, and biological science offers children more involvement and interest. A very few centres offered magnets and electrical equipment for supervised use. Some displays included both biological and physical materials.

Space

Is there more space for outdoor play than for indoor play?

Yes, more outdoor space	26
No, more indoor space	5
Approximately equal space	11

Interviewers estimated that over half the centres had more outdoor than indoor space available for play. An attempt was made to rank the amount of space allotted to dough, carpentry, family play and blocks. This is obviously a difficult exercise since the space often varies; for example, carpentry and dough may go outside when the weather is suitable, and if more children are using blocks they take up more room. Staff attitudes towards mess created are significant too. However, by working out the median ranking, the amount of space allocated appears to be

1 Family Play
2 Carpentry
3 Blocks
4 Dough

Atmosphere

Interviewers were asked to place a cross on a masculine - feminine continuum to indicate their impression of the atmosphere of the place as a whole. Most found this difficult to do, commenting that a wide range of activities was available, and children were treated equally, therefore no feeling of sex came through. In fact, half of the 42 interviewers chose the exact middle of the continuum, indicating a neutral atmosphere. However 14 interviewers thought the atmosphere was more towards feminine, while 7 judged it more towards masculine. They were then asked what factors produced their judgement. Those who said 'more feminine' generally mentioned the predominance of female staff and helpers, mothers present rather than fathers, predominance of female dressing-up clothes, the home-like look of the place with pretty curtains and cushions, and some unnaturally tidy looking rooms. Those who judged the atmosphere more masculine mentioned numerical dominance of boys, more pictures of males on the walls, and in some cases a

masculine theme of the week.

In general, staff were interested in the survey and helpful, depending on their personal opinions on the whole topic. Many were surprised at the results, thought it a good idea to examine their own attitudes, and were eager to point out where they avoided stereotyping. Others had never considered the subject. A few day-care centres were defensive. One supervisor felt that children would grow up insecure if they didn't have firm sex-models presented to them, and that these were formed in the home, and another was heard telling a boy, "Boys don't play with dolls, only girls do".